

LYNCHIAN THRILLER

SOUNDSCAPES:

Why They Work, and What Can We Learn?



Written By **Josef White**

2200828

ADMA6000 'INDEPENDENT PROJECT'

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

p. 1 – 3 **INTRODUCTION**

p. 3 -6 **CASE STUDY 1 – ‘ERASERHEAD’**

p. 6 - 9 **CASE STUDY 2 – ‘BLUE VELVET’**

p. 9 **CONCLUSION**

p. 10 – 13 **BIBLIOGRAPHY**



Before proceeding, take 30 seconds to close your eyes and pay attention to the sound around you...

You will have likely heard the rustling of your clothes, or the squeaking of a chair as you readjust. Perhaps the low hums of the lights that illuminate the surroundings, or there's a chance you heard the blowing of the internal fans of the device you're reading this on.

Had you not taken part in this exercise, you would have been unlikely to have noticed those sounds, their source, or their relationship to the environment you're in – we're so encapsulated by the visuals around us that we often neglect our sonic perception

Our everyday focus on visual stimuli is active, whilst our auditory focus is often passive. If you were to remember a time in your life, you'll be more likely to recall exactly how things were from a visual standpoint rather than auditory, and so despite being integral to the human experience, sound operates just within the periphery of our active consciousness – altering our psyche in a manner that we are often subconscious to within a present moment. Its importance could not be understated, and yet it often is due to its passive nature.

It's with this understanding that motivates the writing of this. As an editor, I hold a firm belief that sound is equally as important to film as visuals. Heading into an ambitious final year in university, the ongoing graduate film production I am working towards is visually in black & white and sits within the 'supernatural gothic thriller' sub-genre. Inspired by the successes of silent film, and its lack of audio-dialogue, intentionally removing one sensory experience (colour), it's important to heighten the importance of another (audio). It's for this reason I am taking keen interest into sound-design and its relationship with the psyche.

Returning to sound and its relationship with the real-world, it could be assumed that the role of sound within film is to replicate the sensory experience of reality, or a reality akin to our own - *and whilst this approach is sometimes appropriate* - Michel Chion's understanding of sound is particularly relevant, and he refutes this by claiming that cinema is a holistic experience in which sound should be designed to serve a psychological reaction in pairing with visuals; not to purely replicate reality, but rather **enhance and add 'value'** to it (1994, p5.).

To provide more context to such a claim, Michel Chion is a French composer and film theorist that specialises within sound, most influential for his contributions to understanding sound-design and the relationship it has to audience perception. As previously stated, the relationship between the two lie at the heart of uncovering the strengths of Lynch's soundscapes, which are of core interest for this study.

His work is relevant, as there are **four** main principles that have been extracted from this book which will serve as the theoretical backbone throughout this analysis, hence their placement so early within this dissertation. They act as key underpinnings that aid in understanding the

relationship between audiences and sound-cinema. These are the summarised principles/techniques that all derive from Chion's book *'Audio-Vision; Sound on Screen'* (1994):

- **Audio-Visual-Contract:** From gunshots to footsteps and musical score, Chion believes that we all sign a metaphorical 'contract' to suspend our disbelief within cinema sound. As an audience, we acknowledge that the majority of the soundscapes we experience are constructed in post, and yet we perceive them as integral to the diegetic world on screen. This is a **core** underpinning of modern film immersion. Thus, the other principles can function. Without this psychological principle, the holistic cinematic experience would fracture, disrupting the cohesion of the ongoing narrative within film.
- **Synchresis:** The immediate connection between visuals and sound within film via a case-by-case basis; creating a unified experience. The word derives from the combination of both 'Synchronism' and 'Synthesis', and means that sound, irrelevant of whether it contextually fits – is synchronised to an on-screen visual cue. An example of this could be the sounds of a creaking door paired with a futuristic spaceship opening; these do not correspond, and yet the audience perceptually bind the two due to the occurrence parallel to one another.

This principle can be utilised in a variety of means, like problem solving involving manipulation of audience perception – as best exemplified in George Steven's 1953 film *'Shane'*. Actor Jack Palance had no difficulty dismounting from a horse, however had difficulty mounting. So instead of excluding such a shot, the 'fix' was to reverse and slow down a shot of Palance dismounting, and add tactile mounting sound effects, such as the metal of a buckle clacking in post-production. Audiences were none-the-wiser, and the illusion had been sold through intelligent, effective sound and visual-design.

- **Anempathetic Sound Design:** Audio that occurs indifferently to ongoing visuals/ story-beats; it is the antithesis of empathetic sound design. This technique severs the connection between visual storytelling and the sonic, emphasising the disconnection through juxtaposition and dissonance. Through this, emotion or thematic elements can be heightened greatly to induce an intended response. This is a technique that is mostly derived from comedy or as demonstrated throughout this study, thriller; two complete opposite ends of the emotional spectrum.

For a comedic response (albeit dark), an example of this could be from Quentin Tarantino's *'Reservoir Dogs'* (1992), in which Michael Madsen's character Mr. Blonde starts to cut a police officer's ear off – to which, as the gruesome act unfolds, the needle drop of Stealers Wheel's track *'Stuck In The Middle With You'* (1973) begins to play. The contrast between the deeply dark on-screen visuals paired with the upbeat folk-pop which creates an ironically memorable scene for its comedic throughline, entirely exemplified by its unfittingly fitting sound. This is an example that utilizes soundtrack, however, that is not the full extension of this technique.

- **Point-of-Audition-Sound:** Sound that is being funnelled from a character's subjective perspective, directly to the audience. It's an auditory equivalent to a POV, displaying what a character is hearing within a given moment. This principle is characterized by an

increase in sound-realism; enhancing reverb or altering the volume of certain diegetic elements within a scene.

An iconic example of this would be from Spielberg's *'Saving Private Ryan'* (1998), in which Private Jackson, played by Barry Pepper, is lining up a series of sniper shots through the lens. As the camera transitions to a POV shot, the sounds of chaos muffle, whilst his breathing gets heavier and more pronounced. This is an auditory shift that places the audiences within Jackson's subjective perspective, emphasising his concentration and anxiety.

Under the lens of Lynchian film, the above principles will be invaluable to understanding their soundscapes and the successes that they pair with. Throughout this writing, *Eraserhead* as a case study appears as a suitable pick, as it serves as an extensive example to the usage of sound to construct a surreal and discomfiting cinematic experience, ***which is a shared desired outcome for the aforementioned graduate project***. Especially for the way it shatters conventional expectations of audio in film, leaning heavily on these principles to immerse audiences in a world that feels both alien and deeply human, which is very fitting to the themes, visual presentation, and message of the film.

To summarise, Chion's framework highlights the multifaceted role of sound in cinema; not merely to be a replication of reality, but an active participant in enhancing environment, evoking emotion and guiding audience expectation. This is a shared outlook that this dissertation will be arguing towards. With that established, the subsequent sections within this dissertation will explore how the sounds of Lynchian worlds, specifically *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet* (1986) exemplify these principles in practice, demonstrating that, despite their different approaches to sound design – they successfully cultivate an immersive, psychologically charged, thrilling auditory experience that enhance both narrative, character and environment.

CASE STUDY 1:

The Cornerstone of 'Lynchian' Sound: 'Eraserhead'

"Everybody has a little different to say, because y' know, it's up to whoever's writing or viewing to make up your own mind" – David Lynch, *'The Cardinal'* (1979)

The above quotation refers to the open-ended nature of *Eraserhead*. Lynch's intention was to leave the interpretation of the film entirely up to the audience, having almost never elaborated on how he himself views the narrative, stating that *"No one, to my knowledge, has ever seen the film the way I see it"* (Lynch, 2014). Widely considered an avant-garde 'art house' film, it follows the journey of Henry as he raises a 'child' born from a loveless partnership, and the personal struggles he contends with as a result. It is presented as a fragmented surreal narrative that does not prioritise structure and total cohesion, but rather mood and psychological depth, with the intention to evoke tension and fear, hence the richness regarding meticulous audio-visual elements. This ambiguity extends beyond the narrative, leaking into the film's sonic construction. The soundscape of *Eraserhead* and how it ties to the narrative is *subjective* just like the plot; yet its effects are *objective*. The film has been lauded for over 50 years, in part

because of the in-depth interplay between mature visuals and experimental sound, culminating in an experience that is narratively foggy, yet unnerving and thrilling.

When discussing the ‘score’ to *Eraserhead*, it is important to acknowledge that it and the soundscape are so intricately woven together to initiate a singular auditory experience; they are one and the same. It is not only a direct sonic representation of the surreal and fragmented world Henry exists within, but also an early example of experimental industrial music, drawing on the harsh, noisy aesthetics that would later come to define the musical genre alongside works from artists like Kraftwerk (1974's *‘Autobahn’*) and Suicide (1977's *‘Suicide’*). The most comparable sub-genre would be *‘harsh noise-wall’*. By incorporating unconventional sounds while still maintaining melodic elements, the score manages to straddle the line between noise and music, enhancing the film's overall messaging.

Having been inspired by the industrial sounds of Philadelphia during the 1970s, David Lynch and Alan Splet meticulously designed the soundscape of *Eraserhead* to capture *the ‘smoke-stacked, factory-worker world’* (2014). However, this industrial setting serves as more than just the mere backdrop for the film, but also a physical manifestation of Henry’s subjective perception of the nightmarish world he inhabits, or more so is ‘trapped’ within.

The sense of being trapped in a liminal industrial space, haunted by echoes of days gone, is a textbook definition of **‘hauntology’** – first coined by French philosopher Jacques Derrida within his titular book *‘Spectres of Marx’* (1993), but further expanded upon by cultural theorist Mark Fisher within his seminal book *‘Ghosts of my Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures’* (2014).

Though the industrial spaces of 1970s Los Angeles were still in operation during filming, *Eraserhead* presents them in a decaying, otherworldly manner that’s much larger than himself. The audio that accompanies the environment thus functions as ‘hauntological artifacts’. They carry the lingering presence of a once-thriving industrial age, which stubbornly clings to Henry and underscores his profound alienation. But this extends to other areas of the film too, like Henry’s room, which appears untidy and aged, as if it has not been maintained but rather just lived in. Throughout these scenes, sounds such as an exaggerated, almost berating constant hum of an old radiator, or creaking of the floors and walls can be heard, which, both their source and sounds, are once again hauntological artifacts; symbols of decay, and their temporal nature, emphasising his psychological stagnation further. He is an oddity in an uncomfortable world, and the sounds around him that both the audience and he experience exemplify this.

Contextually, it is important to acknowledge that viewing a film of this age means that, due to the rapid advancement of audio-technology - all sound within this film, intentional or not, has a lower fidelity. Dependant on the viewer, this could either detract or enhance the soundscape and the film’s resonance.

To further expand upon the specific sources of sound within the audio world of *Eraserhead*, it is important to delve into specific motifs that occur, often relating to diegetic sound with a source, and alternatively non-diegetic where the source is absent – all culminating in a unified soundscape, blending together to create one holistic, nightmarish experience. These motifs often blur the lines between the **external** and **internal**; the external oppressive disorderly chaos of the objective world, and the internal anxieties Henry has projected onto the same subjective world. It could be argued that the audience are enduring the environment as he is; which is a prime example of Chion’s ‘Point-of-Audition Sound’.

Motif 1 – White Noise

No reoccurring sonic motif exemplifies the blurring of the internal and external quite like the omnipresent white noise that follows Henry, regardless of surrounding environment. It can take on the form of a variety of appliances, from hissing and buzzing to the wind blowing or a radiator humming; it is a white noise regardless. An oppressive audio backdrop that underscores Henry's unease, permeating every facet of his existence. Whether he is walking, conversing, or simply trying to sleep, this constant auditory manifestation of tenacious noise fills the spaces where prolonged moments of awkward silence should be, and yet, in comparison to this motif – that would be a less haunting outcome.

This motif cannot be characterized by example; it's consistently present throughout the film's entire run.

This prompts an important question: Why choose to fill the silence with noise, and why does it succeed? Mark Fisher's work continues to be relevant in multiple aspects of this film's soundscape, as to understand as to why this abrasive underlying noise is effective, it is important to grasp the concept of the two modes that he believes fiction operates within; the 'weird', and the 'eerie'. He defines the two modes of fiction within his aptly named book *"The Weird and the Eerie"* (2016) and believes that they are imperative to uncovering why disrupting the 'existing order' creates horror and a sense of being haunted.

According to Fisher, the 'weird' refers to the disruption of the familiar, often introducing something that does not quite belong, yet lacks an explicit explanation. In this instance, the wind or room-tone sound in *Eraserhead*, which exists without clear origin or source, creates a sense of unease through its inexplicable persistence. It feels unnatural, as though the world Henry inhabits is, in some way, fundamentally out of joint. It is not simply the presence of sound that is disturbing, but the way it subtly warps the perception of the space, creating a feeling that Henry is trapped in an environment where the standard rules of sound, time, and space does not apply.

In contrast, the 'eerie' operates in the realm of the familiar, but with a deep sense of dread lurking just beneath the surface. It evokes feelings of something being 'off' about an otherwise recognizable or safe situation. The wind, when paired with Henry's isolation and helplessness, taps into the 'eerie' quality as it continually surrounds him. Within a vacuum, the sound is not so much disturbing, but the fact that it never ceases, never leaving his subconscious, it creates a sense of pervasive unease. It reminds the audience that Henry's world is not a place of comfort but a place that continuously defies his attempts to find peace or clarity.

It could be argued that, on paper, its effectiveness is muted as this motif becomes the status quo, penetrating almost every scene with its presence. However, with the inclusion of other motifs, as well as individual sounds, the effectiveness lingers throughout, continuing to build tension and reflect Henry's mental haze.

Motif 2 – Carnival

Comparatively, throughout the film, fragments of distant carnival-esque music will play out, each often only lasting 10 seconds. The pitch is lower, containing bassier frequencies, which in turn makes it much easier on the ears in direct contrast to the rest of the world. For audiences, this is an auditory treat, acting as a form of sonic catharsis. Although it may often run alongside the 'white noise wind', it still acts as momentary distraction due to its lower sonic qualities. It

relaxes audiences, heightening the effects of sounds yet to occur within the soundscape. For Henry, it is symbolic of a fleeting moment of peace for his psyche amongst a sea of noise. For both audience and the protagonist, it shares a similar purpose; for only audience does it function simultaneously endeavouring to recalibrate the audience's sensitization to the new sonic status quo (*the wind*).

During its first appearance, it could be assumed that this sound is taking place within the diegetic space surrounding Henry, just distant beyond the frame, unattached to any direct visual source. However, during repeated instances in which it can be heard, it is later revealed that this carnival music is instead a nostalgic, comforting echo from Henry's subjective worldview. It brings him to an environment of safety, of which being the stage within the radiator containing a presumed lover. This sound only occurs when Henry is alone, and in clear need of comfort, like walking outside throughout the unwelcoming industrial outdoors, or as his 'baby' is crying relentlessly. He may look unassuming, but his internal struggle is real, and this motif exemplifies this.

Furthermore, it demonstrates Chion's principle of 'Synchresis'. The visual pairing of these solitary moments in conjunction with the carnival music solidifies the interplay between the sound and image. The lo-fidelity and distant quality of the music parallels Henry's psychological detachment from his surroundings, displaying his blurred sense of reality and desperation for comfort, binding these elements in the audience's perception even though the exact source of the music remains ambiguous.

One could conclude that ostensibly, this motif also demonstrates 'Anempathetic' sound design, as it appears to stand out in a sea of harsh noise, differencing itself from the existing state of the sonic world. However, more closely, having understood the context of which it occurs, it could also be argued that it is the antithesis of this principle, instead serving as a deeply empathetic motif that reflects Henry's deepest desire for solace.

Conclusion to Case Study 1:

The soundscape of *Eraserhead* does not conform to the boundaries of diegetic and non-diegetic audio; the **external** and **internal**, existing both in and out of the cinematic to illicit emotion from an audience and amplify Henry's mental state and needs. Thus, transcending conventional sound design, functioning as extensions of Henry's psyche and the oppressive world he inhabits.

The omnipresent white noise reflects his inescapable unease and disorientation, while the carnival music offers fleeting moments of solace, blurring the lines between reality and perception; the objective and subjective. Together, these auditory elements create a soundscape that is not only immersive but also deeply psychological, leaving the audience as unsettled and trapped as Henry himself. This use of sound as an active narrative agent demonstrates that thrillers can heighten suspense and amplify emotional impact by treating sound design as an equal partner to visuals. This case study is evident to the value of using sound to embody dread and tension rather than simply underscore it.

With the groundwork laid by *Eraserhead*, the next case study will turn to *Blue Velvet* (1986) to explore how Lynch and Splet employ similarly potent motifs to craft another intricate and haunting soundscape that heightens the sexual darkness that lives within. In contrast to *Eraserhead*, the two operate in very different narrative and aesthetical frameworks, whilst sharing homogenous sonic makeup.

CASE STUDY 2:

The Progression of ‘Lynchian’ Sound in ‘Blue Velvet’: Subtlety and Precision

“Blue Velvet and Eraserhead are more personal and also more subconscious. There are certain desires that colour your ideas and make them personal.” – David Lynch, ‘Cineaste’ (1987)

The above quotation refers to the intimate and instinctive qualities that connect both works. Whilst *Blue Velvet* may initially appear more grounded in reality, operating within an idyllic American town during the 80s, in contrast to the surreal, industrial nightscape of *Eraserhead* could not appear more different on the surface – yet both of their sonic worlds reveal layers of tension, unease, and vulnerability through experimental, textured noise; it is their application that varies. Where *Eraserhead* can appear to overwhelm the senses with an oppressive, omnipresent unified soundscape, *Blue Velvet* takes a more deliberate approach, using specific auditory motifs in conjunction with certain visuals to reflect Jeffrey’s continued descent into psychosexual mystery of the town; the film’s soundscape is not as constant or immersive as in *Eraserhead*, but it is no less crucial.

Nominated and awarded an Academy Award for ‘Best Director’ (IMDB, 2024), *Blue Velvet* is a narrative driven psychological thriller. It explores the dark sexual secrets of the suburban town, Lumberton. following the protagonist, Jeffrey’s journey from innocence to a haunting confrontation with temptation and evil. It delves into themes such as voyeurism, hypersexuality and trauma, displaying the duality of the human condition and how it handles eroticism. Just as its predecessor (*Eraserhead*) this picture delves into the subconscious human psyche within a thriller form-factor and is once again lauded 40 years later for its in-depth interrelation between conscientiously crafted, yet disturbing imagery, and intricate sound design that highlights the strengths of Lynch and Splet’s previous work

Regarding the score, *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet* achieve similar final outcomes through very different means. Unlike the former, *Blue Velvet*’s score is not weaved into the soundscape to create a singular unified experience but rather operates within a separate track that occurs parallel. This differentiation executes a pivotal role in building the emotional and psychological depth of the film without disrupting one another; like a symphony, it is deliberate.

Written and produced by Angelo Badalamenti (1986), the score takes clear influences from lush orchestral arrangements made for melodramas within the 1960s, like Douglas Sirk’s *Imitation of Life* (1959) or Jaques Demy’s *Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964). However, it is apparent that Badalamenti’s interpretation of this take was to embed minor key shifts, especially during the opening segments, signifying the duality of the film. The idealistic town is conveyed by the lush melodramatic arrangement, and its reality is represented by the momentary shift from major to minor chords. This adds psychological depth, denoting to engaged audiences that corruption lies ahead, even when it is not apparent through visuals alone. This is an example of Chion’s ‘Anempathetic’ sound design principle, as this musical cue, although minor, is occurring indifferently to unassuming idyllic urban visuals that display a picturesque town.

The differentiating factors between the score and the soundscape of *Blue Velvet* are found in their purpose. In *Eraserhead*, both elements share the same purpose due to their unified nature and the ambiguity of the narrative. *Blue Velvet* has a clear separation between the two, reflecting the straightforward narrative of the film. The score exists within a non-diegetic context, except for Dorothy performing Bobby Vinton's 1963 rendition of '*Blue Velvet*'. This reflects the ever-changing narrative, guiding the audience to engage consciously whenever a dynamic shifts, like the reveal of Frank's twisted actions towards Dorothy, or when Jeffery undergoing detective work. Conversely, the soundscape provides audiences with minute shifts in mood that either build or alleviate tension, while simultaneously enhancing and integrating within the film's world.

Revisiting Lynch and Splet's contribution to the soundscape of *Blue Velvet*- it's evident that the central design philosophy is based on delicacy and precision, reflective of the themes of duality between innocence and hidden terror amongst a quaint town. Each sound is carefully selected and utilised to enhance the film's psychological complexity, from the faint rustling of leaves and bugs to the intermittent textured sounds of emitted by the flames of a candle. By minimizing the use of overt sound effects and relying on quiet, atmospheric details, Lynch and Splet allow the world to feel both real and unsettling, where the smallest sonic elements carry disproportionate weight.

As *Eraserhead*, there are auditory motifs that occur throughout the film that enhance the audience's experience of character and narrative. However, despite sharing similar haunting outcomes- they possess very different aesthetics that contrast *Eraserhead*. This displays that despite operating differently ostensibly, they carry out the similar purposes, reflecting the contrast between both films across all fronts.

Motif 1 – Silence

In stark contrast to *Eraserhead*'s omnipresent, abrasive white-noise erupting from every faucet of the bleak visual world, *Blue Velvet*'s usage of silence inverts that motif; representing the counter-opposite design philosophies Splet and Lynch had for this picture. However, it must be acknowledged that, to call this a '*motif*' could be considered a slight stretch of the truth, as it is not a reoccurring sound, but rather an absence of one. However, the *Oxford Dictionary's* (2018) most recent definition of the word, states that it is "a recurring subject, theme, idea, etc., especially in a literary, artistic, or musical work". So, irrelevant of its lacking sonic qualities, silence remains an idea, therefore, qualify as a motif.

There are many prominent cases of pure silence within this film, but one stand-out example occurs as Jeffery is watching Dorothy undress from her closet. It's an intimate moment between both characters and the audience, and the silence acts as an auditory amplifier to Jeffery's disbelief, leaving no room for moral distraction as both the character and audience observe such a vulnerable moment. At this point within the narrative, the audience recognise protagonist's motivations and the temptation he feels, and yet the absence of audio forces the audience to confront his actions, reflecting on the moral implications of the scene, and on a broader scale: the entire film.

However, just as much as this is a scene of intimacy, this is also a moment that captures tension and suspense in its purest form, without any indication of an interruption from the abnormal/ paranormal – this speaks to the immorality of the scene, and the potency of silence as a means to build anticipation. The silence between both characters amplifies every

movement, shift in body language and potential unspoken thought, leaning into the audience's innate 'arousal for anticipation' – which is a theory proposed by Noel Carroll within his book *"The Philosophy of Horror; or Paradoxes of the Heart"* (1990). He believes that "anticipation is a subcategory of suspense" (p. 137). This sustained anticipation, which is intensified by the prolonged silence, places the audience in a position where they are waiting for the unexpected. The lack of present audio creates a vacuum of expectation, where the audience's emotional state is charged with the potential for disruption.

Motif 2 – 'Blue Velvet'

Drawing comparisons to *Eraserhead*'s means of auditory release (the carnival sound), *Blue Velvet* utilises a similar motif, but for all that, it is multi-functional and operates variably within different scenes dependant on the context. It takes on the form of a variety of diegetic and non-diegetic elements, such as being performed by Dorothy at 'The Slow Club' as her 'favourite song to sing' or acting as a part of the soundtrack, in both diegetic and non-diegetic means. Throughout the film it underscores the cross-section between nostalgia, corruption, sexuality, and menace, making it a crucial element of the story. As a diegetic element during Dorothy's performance, the song exudes melancholy and longing, reflecting her entrapment within Frank. Conversely, during its non-diegetic appearances, it often takes on a foreboding temper, signifying corruption and danger as it plays over often unassuming visuals.

This is due to the film's first usage of the song during the opening minutes of film, as the audience is subjected to the world of *Blue Velvet*; taking in the unsuspecting bright idyllic town. However, this serene atmosphere is abruptly disrupted when Jeffrey's father suffers a stroke, collapsing while watering the lawn. The camera hangs on this shot for more time than one should expect; it is uncomfortable, and borderline *uncanny*. This unexpected shift in tone changes the audience's perception of the song's usage, transforming it from a symbol of romanticized idealism into a haunting reminder of the underlying darkness that lives within every facet of the fragile human experience. This tone is further altered when the preceding shot transitions to an extreme close-up of grass, dirt, and scuttering insects, accompanied by a deep, bassy hum that grows increasingly prominent. The higher frequencies of Bobby Vinton's voice linger faintly, only to be gradually overwhelmed by the ominous, droning soundscape.

Sigmund Freud within his study *'Das Unheimliche'* (1919)– translated as *'The Uncanny'* in English – confronts the idea of nostalgic presentation when unsettling realities are inflicted. To Freud, the idea of 'uncanny' is held up by two core, non-contradicting attributes: the *'familiar and agreeable'* with the other being *'concealed and kept out of sight'* (p. 4). In relation to the opening sequence, what was once 'familiar' and romantic, has been ultimately tainted with 'out of sight' horrors. From this moment onwards, the audience is unable sever the connection between the song and the thought of unknown malevolence; it has transitioned from innocent to dark within the mind of the viewer.

The song reoccurs throughout *Blue Velvet* a total of 4 times, continuing to reinforce its dual nature, and representing the unseen horrors lurking within the seemingly idyllic and unsuspecting. Whether it is tied to Frank Booth's psychotic hypersexuality or Dorothy's tragic vulnerability, it underscores the perpetual tension between innocence and corruption. Only in the film's final moments, as the narrative resolves to a seemingly happy conclusion, does the song return to its original, untainted form. This restoration of its innocence reflects a return to the status quo, though, having experienced the message of the film, the audience continues to remain aware of the fragility and constructed nature of this facade.

CONCLUSION:

To conclude, this dissertation aimed to showcase and provide conclusive evidence as to the importance of sound design, notably within thrillers, with an exclusive emphasis on David Lynch pictures like *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet*. Its purpose was to dissect both films and understand where their sound design differs, despite the fact that they're routed to the same desired outcome; building tension and offering a thrilling, in-depth experience.

While *Eraserhead* relies on a singular, immersive soundscape to create an overwhelming, all-encompassing atmosphere — one that envelops the viewer in a constant state of unease and dread. It is for this that the soundscape is inseparable from the film's identity; it functions as a near-omnipresent force that mirrors the Henry's internal turmoil and the oppressive external industrial world he exists within. Every element of the soundscape is designed to overwhelm the senses, with only a singular carnival motif that brings a semblance of comfort to both character and audience. This unified sound design dissolves the boundary between diegetic and non-diegetic sound, blurring the internal mind of Henry with the external environment around him. It is evident that the design philosophy for this film was to engulf the audience in an abrasive world across all fronts; it is **non-conventional**.

In contrast, *Blue Velvet* presents a more structured and deliberate use of sound, where the score and soundscape operate as distinct entities running in parallel rather than unified. The composed score, with its lush orchestral arrangements influenced by 1960s melodramas, actively guides the viewer's emotional response, highlighting moments of tension, intimacy, or malice, whilst subtly hinting towards a darker underbelly through subtle shifts in scale. Meanwhile, the soundscape doubles as a tool that both grounds the realism of the film's world, whilst also layering atmospheric details like prolonged silence, bassy hums or use of soundtrack that engage the audience with a flippant tone, or the promise of a pay-off. It is very clear that the design philosophy for this film was to embrace sonic precision to retain audience engagement. Whilst there are traces of *Eraserhead*'s auditory DNA within *Blue Velvet*, it is more **conventional**.

Together, these films display the versatility of sound design as a narrative tool, capable of evoking a variety of emotion with equal impact. Through their differing approaches, *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet* achieve the same ultimate goal; to captivate and challenge the audience, engaging them not just visually, but sonically and psychologically. This exploration affirmed that sound design is not merely an accompaniment to the visuals but a driving force in crafting cinematic art.

BIBLIOGRAPHY (*in alphabetic order*):

1. Badalamenti, A., 1986. *Blue Velvet* [Original Motion Picture Score]. MCA Records.

2. Carrol, N. (1990) *The Philosophy of Horror; Paradoxes of the Heart*. Oxford: Routledge
3. Chion, M. (1994). *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*. Translated by C. Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press.
4. Derrida, J. (1994). *Specters of Marx: the State of the debt, the Work of mourning, and the New International*. New York: Routledge.
5. Ebiri, B. Lynch, D. and Vulture (2014). *David Lynch Thinks No One Will Ever Agree on What Eraserhead Is About*. [online] Vulture. Available at: <https://www.vulture.com/2014/09/david-lynch-interview-eraserhead-midnight-movies.html> (Accessed: 17th December 2024)
6. Fisher, M. (2014). *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. Zero Books.
7. Fisher, M. (2016). *The weird and the eerie*. London: Repeater Books.
8. Freud, S. (1925) *Das Unheimliche 'The Uncanny'*. Translated by Strachey, A. *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*

9. IMDb. (2024). *Blue Velvet (1986) - Awards - IMDb*. [online] Available at: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0090756/awards/> [Accessed 15 Jan. 2025].
10. Kraftwerk (1974) *Autobahn* [Album] Kraftwerk. Warner Music Group Company.
11. Lynch, D. (1977) *Eraserhead* [Film]. USA: Libris. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/eraserhead-1977> (Accessed: 10 November 2024).
12. Lynch, D. (1986) *Blue Velvet* [Film]. USA: Libris. Available at: https://archive.org/details/7.7-blue-velvet-1986-mystery_202310 (Accessed: 27th December 2024)
13. Lynch, D. and Laurent B. (1987) *Blue Velvet: An Interview with David Lynch* [Interview]. Cineaste. Available at <https://www.oocities.org/~mikehartmann/intbvcineas.html> (Accessed 29th December 2024)
14. Sirk, D. (1959) *Imitation of Life* [Film]. USA: Universal Pictures. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/imitation-of-lifes-sirk-with-lana-turner-john-gavin> (Accessed 2nd January 2025)
15. *Shane* (1953) Directed by George Stevens [Film]. USA: Paramount Pictures. Available at:

https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/video/detail/amzn1.dv.gti.9cb8b26a-f0cc-e9c2-820f-0eac230616bc?autoplay=0&ref=atv_cf_strg_wb (Accessed: 19 November 2024).

16. Stealers Wheel (1973) *Stuck in the Middle with You* [Song]. *Stealers Wheel*. A&M Records.
17. Spielberg, S. (1998) *Saving Private Ryan* [Film]. USA: Paramount Pictures. Available at:
https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/video/detail/amzn1.dv.gti.a403e497-c5df-48cf-a634-fade591c4b8a?autoplay=0&ref=atv_cf_strg_wb (Accessed: 29th November)
18. Tarantino, Q. (1992) *Reservoir Dogs* [Film]. USA: A Band Apart, Miramax Films. Available at:
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Reservoir-Dogs-Harvey-Keitel/dp/B00ET1V0C8> (Accessed: 20 November 2024).
19. The Cardinal, Lynch, D. (2018). *David Lynch talks Eraserhead in 1979 [2016]*. [online] Available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOSWEccofLw>.
(Accessed: 15th December 2024)
20. Suicide (1977) *Suicide* [Album] Suicide. Mute Records; BMG.
21. Vinton, B. (1963) *Blue Velvet*. [Single] Epic Records. Available at: Spotify (Accessed: 7 January 2025).